

with his friends. i don't remember whether he told me not to tell my mother; probably he did, since i don't remember ever ratting to her, and i suspect she would have been furious. i didn't like being left out there. in those days it was safe enough, but it was also boring. he may have left me with a book and permission to use the car light, but i've never been much good at reading to kill time, although my own kids are. he may have said it was all right to listen to the radio, but there wouldn't have been much of interest to a kid on our few stations. mostly i remember sitting in the driver's seat, turning the steering wheel, probably pretending i was at the controls of a tank. i lived mainly in my own head in those days, as i still do.

i don't know if my father had a girlfriend in the bar. kids would have been allowed inside, i think, so maybe he did. it would be fine with me if he did, but more likely he just wanted a few drinks with men his own age, people who had been through the same mill and were still going through it. i've never left my own kids in a car, because i hated it so myself, and, of course, it would be taking a big risk these days. but i don't hold it against my father — we were usually on the way home from some ballgame that he'd taken me to — he did lots of things with me and was (except when he tried to teach me to golf) generally a patient man. he deserved some life of his own — god knows, my mother made plenty of time for her own clubs and classes. and i guess i learned how to tolerate boredom in such situations, learned that time does pass, albeit more slowly, when you have nothing to do but wish it along, not ever knowing exactly how much longer you will have to wait. i wonder if kids today can deal with it.

THE NUNS

everybody ridicules them, especially people who have only encountered them in the media and risque jokes.

i was educated by them from kindergarten through eighth grade. i received an excellent education

from them. they drilled us daily in the basics; consequently, i still know my grammar and spelling and can do most of the basic arithmetic in my head. what i can't do there, i can do with a pencil and pad. i've never used a calculator or a spell check in my life.

i don't remember ever having my knuckles rapped with a ruler; i don't remember ever witnessing any form of capital punishment. if there was any, it must have been mild and infrequent and, no doubt, much less than deserved. because the nuns had the support of their superiors and of the parents, a trip to the principal's office and a call from the principal to the parent was usually more than sufficient deterrent to delinquency. of course, we still dared to pass notes and giggle and amuse ourselves sotto voce and behind their backs, at least in the later grades, but when we were caught we might have to stay after class and finish a practice test for the statewide regents' exams, or memorize a poem, or maybe just sit there in silence, with extra time added on if we lapsed. the discipline was no police state, but a classroom never got out of control. the truly disruptive were simply expelled.

we didn't have movies or any other audiovisual devices other than our textbooks and the blackboards and the occasional children's philharmonic concert or seventh game of a world series or abdication of someone kingly, like mc arthur that was broadcast over the p.a. speakers. there were many forms of academic (and fund-raising) competition, from spelling bees to the simple pride in being the first to raise one's hand with a correct answer or to memorize a multiplication table or the names of the continents or the capitals of the states. if we were bright, we were never made to feel ashamed of it, but we were regularly

reminded that our brains were a gift of god and no cause for the sin of pride or of lack of charity towards those less gifted. christ had delivered numerous parables on pedagogical issues.

i think there was harm in some of the religious teaching, most notably those on sex, and in some of the political assumptions, but these were, after all, by no means the exclusive province of the catholic church in the post-World War II era.

although we had virtually no physical education except for the few minutes of calisthenics the nuns might lead us through twice a day in the aisles between our seats, and our eighth grade basketball and volleyball teams, a lot of us grew up quite athletic. we played our sports after school, at parks and deserted lots and in the middle of sidestreets, developing our own rules and a resiliency similar to that of ghetto kids today, playing tackle football, for instance, without pads. and of course we irish and italian and polish catholics were in virtually de facto segregated neighborhoods. the public schools wouldn't even let our teams in their leagues. if they did schedule a game against us we had to be on our best behavior, no swearing or arguing with the referees — just about no displays of emotion whatsoever. our fans were not allowed to boo the visiting teams. trash talk wasn't even part of our vocabulary. if we were perhaps subtly encouraged to feel superior to protestants, it was mainly so that we would never think of ourselves as inferior. jews, we took to be our equals. negroes, we sympathized with, but seldom encountered — they lived downtown and there weren't many of them and almost none of them were catholic. there was not a black in our parish, which is now all black. i later noticed to my shock and disappointment that some of the priests were prejudiced, but i cannot recall a single innuendo from the nuns. we sent money to the african missions. we were taught no prejudice except to thank god that

we were born catholic and american.
i still thank him for the latter, and
should very possibly be thanking him
for the former also.

we had a little art (much to my
humiliation) and a lot of music
(which i lived for). i received early
and constant encouragement for my
writing (granted, they had no way of
knowing how i would turn out, except
for the notoriety writers have so
regularly earned themselves).

all but one nun liked me, i think,
and i liked a lot of things about
her: her strapping youth, her directness,
her reputation as a reckless driver of
the convent station wagon. i would have
liked her to like me, and i still don't know
what she didn't like about me, perhaps
my blooming acne. maybe she could tell
i undressed her in my thoughts. i fell
romantically in love with each year's
nun, and one of my college girlfriends
even became a nun, and i still harbor
fetishistic fantasies, although the
religious orders have sacrificed so much of
their allure to secularity in attire and
demeanor; the mystery is gone. i miss
the gregorian chant they taught us also.

so i have no great complaints about the
nuns or my elementary school education.
as our current schools get worse, i
appreciate mine more. i marvel at the
pedagogical versatility of the nuns and
their dedication to their tasks. i do
not question their motivations for the
life they chose — what does it matter?
let us heal ourselves. their callings
worked for them. and for me.

DAVID HOCKNEY: PORTRAIT OF ANDY WARHOL, PARIS, 1974

i've never wanted to meet david hockney.
i never wanted to meet andy warhol.

i have met a few famous people,
but there are only very few
that i ever wanted to meet.